

# Lesley Battler | Journal | 1982





## **Journal archive project**

### **Introduction**

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

## **Vol. 2, 1982**

Still rudderless – Clinging to the past – Many trips to Barrie, Orillia, Toronto, Montréal and Kingston – Death in the family – I attend a Christian Science church service – Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* in Toronto – New Wave films at the Carlton Cinema – Local newspaper photography – Community college – New relationships.

**Jan. 1**

Listened to music in Jim's room. Exquisite. Then we went downstairs. Jim's Aunt Kay and Uncle Harry were there. Mr Mills was drunk and he kept us well-informed of his progress. Mr Mills and Aunt Kay bickered the whole time. It was frightening. Mr Mills's anger was overwhelming, his badgering and bluster. Heard how Mr Mills "socked" a visitor to the house who insulted Mrs Mills by not eating a sandwich she had prepared. Mr Mills gave the man a bruise and knocked him to the floor. Mrs Mills looked miserable and embarrassed. She kept telling him to calm down and not act "like such an idiot." Apparently, on the day he retired from the Credit Union (he was president), he sat and played Vera Lynn records all day long. Today he reminisced about the war, and how he led a squadron of troops through France with only one casualty.

Jim's Aunt Kay is very sharp. At one point she looked over at me and said in a threatening voice, that although "we fight like cats and dogs we are very clannish and let no man dare interfere with us." Mrs Mills chuckled and said she didn't think I was about to interfere with anyone. At one point Mr Mills pointed his finger at me and asked point blank what I thought of the whole situation. I wasn't too sure what he meant, my guess was the Fred-Jim-me triangle. I deflected. What else could I do. There isn't really a triangle. I think the situation is just me trying to hold onto a friendship that meant something to me but has now just become strange.

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Two hours or so before my bus was to leave, Jim took me to the arboretum. He berated himself for not having done anything right all week, then discovered he had run out of gas.

We walked up the road in blue darkness to one of the houses, wind swishing through the trees. A man gave us gas to get back, and a ride back to the car in his truck. Jim's eyes looked so soft in the porch light, soft, gentle. He got me to the Dorval terminal with time left to spare.

Fred met me at the Toronto terminal. I was so so happy to see him. Cards and gifts from Sharon, the Professor, Chris H., Fred, Al, Sir J and Rosalind. Just what I needed after a strange isolated emotionally oppressive week. Val phoned while I was in Montreal. Glad I missed that one.

### **Jan. 17**

Went into Toronto to see Jim, who is in town visiting his sister. We wandered all over the Kensington Market area. I love this part of Toronto, the houses are painted in bright colours, Gauguin reds, a festive feeling. Went into a cheese shop that sold cheeses from all over the world. Snowing. We slid down streets, past store windows, lights with haloes around them. As I slid, occasionally J would catch me. I felt so comfortable and light-hearted with him tonight. Nice being able to say something and have it understood. The sky was cloudy, grey-blue, snowflakes whirling around the streetlights. So many different towns within Toronto. Went to Just Desserts for strawberry cheese cake and croissants. Servers dressed all in black, slender and lithe as cat burglars. J and I always spend time in Union Station before I catch the last train. We sit in a corner, eat cheese and talk until the train comes.

### **Jan. 24**

Toronto with Jim again. We explored areas I had never seen before. Walked down Queen Street. Old buildings against a deep rich blue sky. Second-hand bookstores. Dark attics, roofs silhouetted against dark purple sky. We went to Jim's sister Suzy's house. Drank wine and poked fun at people on TV. Played a tape of lovely music. I went out to catch the bus, but managed to miss the midnight train.

I returned to Suzy's house to spend the night and slept, wrapped in Jim's sleeping bag on the fold-out couch. He kept trying to tickle me. Again with the tickling. He massaged my back and told me I was very tense. Maybe because of missing the train, spending the night in an unfamiliar place, in an awkward situation? Jim has a way of turning my every feeling into something pathological, a symptom of some deep psychological problem. Kept dozing and waking all night. In and out of dream and reality. Light coming through the door, pale, blue, unfamiliar. I woke up, alarmed, because I did not know where I was.

Watched Sesame Street with Melissa, Suzy's two year-old daughter. She calls Jim the "bush-guy." After Jim and I finally left Suzy's, we went and had pina colada and papaya milkshakes. Then on to meet his middle sister, Kathy, who works in a bank. No real contact between Kathy and me. Like Suzy, she is model-attractive, lustrous dark hair, luminous grey eyes, catlike face, but I found her cold. She speaks in a whispery voice that chilled me, and makes me feel like the Hulk looming over a porcelain figurine. Headache. Caught the 7:00 train back to Whitby.

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Toronto again. An uplifting day with Jim. Windy, blue-grey day, fine misty air. Soft pale light, cloudy sky. Beautiful walking weather. Went to Kensington Market again, past the gaily painted houses and people who smiled at us. Went into a cheese shop where we sampled cheeses from all over the world. Streets meander by buildings that don't look any more substantial than cardboard and paper. Walls shudder, doors open, papers and cardboard flutter in the wind. Everything in motion, constant change. Wind ripples luminous puddles. Sudden turn and I don't know where I am. I could be in Laurence Durrell's Alexandria, labyrinthine streets, tiny shops, every doorway leading to a mystery. Sky uncertain whether to rain or shine, laugh or cry. Gust of wind, scarves fluttering like banners.

Soft sound of running water, slush, squeaky snow. A coast, a last outpost before the immensity of ocean. Sky darkened. Walked into a park and saw a charming church, the colour of mayonnaise with delicate lines. Near that, a tall black tree, branches sweeping toward it. We designated it "our tree."

Went to see *Chariots of Fire*. I felt inspired, full of possibility. Jim and I walked past the shops. Steam rose from the sewers, smelling of seaweed, making me feel I was even closer to the sea. Shadows all around us, melting, flowing apart, joining again. Doorways became shadowy caves, windows, grottos, streets, canals. Neon lights streaming onto the sidewalks. Our conversation was intimate, fantastical. He told me he had wanted to get me a long-stemmed red rose, but hadn't been able to manage it. When we walked into Union Station we saw a rose lying on top of an ashtray. Jim picked it up and gave it to me.

These days in Toronto with Jim have been magic. Together we are conjurors; there is nothing we cannot bring into being. When the time is right, nobody can follow me as deeply as he does, no one is as perceptive.

### **Jan 30**

Day after my Toronto adventures I was off cruising with Fred into a snowstorm, dressed in big boots and down jacket. One day I'm a Bohemian wandering through Kensington, and the next, Grizzly Adams.

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Sharon called, and I became an "unemployed bum" again, my life worth nothing because I "gave my job up." That horrible survey job? They never called me back! At one point during the conversation she called me Flo. She wasn't even talking to me, she was just talking. Wheeze has invited the two of us down to Kingston for Valentine's Day. Sharon told me the Wheeze really wanted to see me, but didn't sound altogether pleased about it. In fact, she sounded a lot like Boot – a similar tone of resentful envy.



### **Feb. 3**

Val called. She is staying with her friend in Toronto, and I guess I will be going in to see her tomorrow. I'm certainly apprehensive. She sounded bright, warm, expansive on the phone, but I don't think we have anything in common any more. I still feel so much affection for her. I admire her spirit, but what kind of friend says the things she does? Why do I have such critical, manipulative people in my life? I can't think of anyone I could go to if something bad happened to me. But, for better or worse, after three months of no contact, I see her tomorrow.

Fred and I went out cruising in the snow. Roads enclosed by snow, ice lining the edges, frozen froth. Hazy gold lights. Passed a factory made of squares and rectangles, brown and beige, shadows, pale smoke hovering over it like steam rising from cauldrons being stirred inside. So nervous about seeing Val tomorrow. Drove up a narrow road, wind chasing around on the surface of the snow creating whorls, whirlpools, basins. A tall old building, all dark grey, windows two lonely eye-holes. Eerie. Nothing but ghostly street light.

Turned down another road. Snow drifts advancing in waves. The engine went dead. Sat in the car as if trapped in a bathysphere at the bottom of the sea. Finally someone stopped. Fred went to get booster cables. I grew so cold I had to get out of the car and run, my feet were numb. I ran to the crest of the hill but there was no one there. Fred and the other driver disappeared, leaving only the long road before me, slinking in and out of snow-dunes, the city only a flush of pink. Ran back to the car, half expecting it to vanish before I got there. It looked small and defenceless.

Soon as we got the engine started again, we got stuck. Plunged into knee-deep snow, dry, smooth clinging, snakelike snow. A plow came by. The driver pulled the car out for us, and at 4:30-ish a.m, we were on our way again.

#### **Feb. 4**

Met Val in Toronto. We embraced and chattered at each other for a while, then went to the Elephant & Castle in the Eaton's Centre for some Toby beer. I ended up telling her I'd seen Al, and that he and Sharon broke up. Val always looks so alert, predatory, when she's hunting for information. She told me she was staying at a rooming house in Toronto, and had been there three months without contacting me. I was a bit hurt, but admire her doing that. We walked to the house, which had posters on the wall, nooks, cubby-holes, an old wooden staircase and verandah, reminding me of the one in Bracebridge. She talked a lot about her housemates, Denis and Matt.

Against my better judgement, I also told her some of the things I had talked about with Jim. Her tricks are so obvious – pretending she already knows, telling me things to make it look as if she has confided her heart and soul to me, and it would be selfish and cold of me not to reciprocate. Yet when I am physically with her, none of this matters. A warm affection washes over me. I also realize that she says and expresses things that are inside me – things I keep hidden under large rocks. She openly expresses things I can only think or feel. She gets to me every time, because I have always wanted to hear someone tell me I was their best friend in the world. This is my vulnerable, needy place – the wide-open back door where the manipulative, controlling people enter.

She seemed somewhat surprised that I had figured out that she had been in Toronto all this time, and not staying with her friend Ellie Aylesworth. Elementary, my dear Val. I knew you could not be staying with Ellie because you were not gesticulating or talking like Ellie. Your entire demeanor would have been superficial and quite insufferable (to me) had you spent that much time with Ellie.

Val gave me a gift – a little stained glass box with a castle on it, symbolizing the Welsh castle I fantasized about with Al (at the antique store in Kingston). I didn't bring any gifts. Val is prescient, instinctive, highly intuitive. I have great respect for her perceptions. She is highly tuned about subtle shifts in moods, atmospheres, undertones. However, she limits herself by seeing too many negative aspects. The rest of the afternoon was spent companionably and then she started easing me away so she could spend the rest of the day with Matt. The day ended on a neutral, inconclusive note. The warm glow I felt for her in the pub became a detached companionship.

Val's little digs about women being bitches, and how she is not used to having anyone defend her [i.e, me, i.e, I'm a crappy friend]. I figure it's best to ignore these comments as if they go right over my head. Sometimes I feel like telling her she should be more subtle! Remarks so obviously made to either get back at me for all my wrongs, or to get a rise out of me, merely amuse me now because they are too obvious. Val knows all the games but doesn't play them subtly enough.

### **Feb. 10**

The phone rang. It was Fred's brother Bob (the OB), a very emotional OB, calling to inform Fred that their father had died that very afternoon. He had been found dead beside his car. Apparently, he got stuck, had been trying to shovel it out, had a heart attack and died on the spot. I never liked the man (feeling was mutual), but what a way to go. I keep wondering about the person who found him!

### **Feb. 18**

Went to the funeral in Aylmer. It was a stiff, unemotional gathering. Mr Cooling, Bob's wife Kathy's father, who bears a definite resemblance to Walter Matthau, spilled coffee all over himself. Erma is the woman Fred's father was living with – and I will say no more about the man's puritanism and his utter hypocrisy.

Fred's mother, Marria (the Valkyrie) was there. Belligerent, expected to be the star of the show, although she and Willem divorced ages ago. At one point I heard her bellowing to someone about how I didn't take the Van Driel name. She will never get over that. Too bad so sad. Just keep on raging about it – knock yourself out! Considering how I feel about the family in general, I am so glad I didn't capitulate. Personally, if I had my druthers, I would also dump the Battler and choose a completely different name for myself.

Erma was the nicest person in the room, and seeing her grief was the only sad thing about the whole thing. Fred's oldest brother, Eric, sat on one side of her at the funeral parlour and I sat on the other side, and I felt a current of sympathy between the three of us.

The only thing I can remember about the funeral itself was the little sign above the door that said "Willem Van Driel" in neat white block letters. It looked so final. We all proceeded into the room, looked at the coffin, like people in an elevator staring at the numbers, or at our feet. Impossible to imagine a body being in that coffin. Small church service.

I drove back to Montréal with Eric in Fred's car. Fred went with his mother. Eric arranged the whole thing. Realize how much Eric likes to take charge of things. He is soft-spoken, courteous and tactful, but he always manages to arrange things to suit himself. Best of all, he has the knack of making it look like he is doing everyone a big favour by taking over. Eric always knows when to change the subject, and when not to talk about something. He is quite intuitive. He was always quick to pick up on when Erma was upset and steer the conversation down another path. He is protective of his family and can't seem to bear losing contact with them for any length of time.

At first I thought the drive back would be horribly awkward. We didn't say a word to each other for a long time. I just gazed out at the dark snowbanks. Finally the ice broke and Eric talked the whole way to Montréal. He talked about the funeral, going to France, photo labs etc. etc. and all I had to do was toss in a few phrases and questions to keep him going.

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Wonderful being back in Montréal. It feels like home to me. My heart starts pounding as soon as I enter the city. Not even Kensington Market in Toronto does that to me. Fred and I went to all our old haunts, Fairmont Bagels, Athanor, St-Denis, St-Laurent. We cruised down Ste-Catherine listening to Murray the K.

Saw *Christiane F* at Cinema V. German with English subtitles. Terrifying movie, both the story and the photography. Interesting the differences between French and German movies. French films seem to be nostalgic, wistful, melancholy, bittersweet. There is a shadow softness and shimmering reflections. There always seems to be a deep compassion for the characters and the human condition in general.

This German film seemed much less personal, larger in scope. The scenes were as dreamlike as in the French movies, but an impersonal, detached, collective dream. The people were tiny, alienated, dwarfed by the immensity of their urban settings. The film had a strange beauty, but a relentless, impersonal one. Lurid lighting, grey-green stripes, flickering bars of white light. Hospital colours, institutional hallways. The instruments used for preparing the heroin were sharp and gleaming, the shopping centre was huge, grey-green, large pillars, people clustered there like tumbleweeds set down by the wind. A bus shimmered like a mirage in a wasteland. Ethereal, but galactic, Plutonian, in its detachment. Chills raced up and down my spine. David Bowie perfect in the movie. He was androgynous, alienated, extra-terrestrial.

Unfortunately, we had to go to Fred's brother Bob's house straight after the movie. He complained about the stain on his wall-to-wall shag carpet. I was still living in the movie and couldn't remember anything else about the visit.

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Went with Fred to visit the photo lab. He does love old haunts. Mild day of melty greys, snow like blue cheese. The lab tall, cramped, Dickensian. I used to call it the Bastille. Saw CJ three times and stood demurely while CJ talked with Fred. He seems to smile more than I remember. I talked with Edith for a while, she is so nice. Later Fred and I stood outside the lab talking to Glen. He gave Fred his condolences and seemed to choke up. I wondered if he had recently lost a father.

CJ came out through the door (which I was quite intentionally blocking), and brushed against me. He turned around with that same bright smile. He was also wearing a plaid shirt with red in it. I have never seen him wear anything except black and dark blue. He seems lighter, happier I hope. Glen told Fred that CJ was undergoing a personality change, becoming more easy-going – not strangling Mohammed any more. Although, I always liked CJ for that. If anyone needed a good strangling it was Mohammed. He's been going to EST meetings with David Jones. None of this really surprises me - I did see CJ reading *the Story of Philosophy* in the restaurant that day.

### March 16

Met Val in Toronto. Whimsical afternoon trundling down Queen Street in the pouring rain, deking into vintage clothing stores, ogling the gorgeous black velvets, sweetheart necklines, sumptuous lingerie. We lapsed into old ways, the rain like Kingston. A low-key, comfortable day. We had a pint of Toby draught at the Elephant & Castle. She talked mostly about Matt. Once again I felt myself slipping into my old role as buffoon, slightly awkward klutz. We wandered around the Eaton Centre saying our own phrases and expressions, the colour and vividness of our language.

She expressed some reservations about Matt. Says he somehow draws back from her a little when she tells him that she cares for him, as if he doesn't quite believe her. It was a curiously harmonious time, though, as if all strong feelings for anything, for each other, were all suspended. Undercurrents running far below the surface today

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Went to a Tai Chi demonstration, another one of Fred's newspaper events. Stuart Liem moved with grace and fluidity yet at the same time so much energy and tension. I loved the movements of the group, graceful fluid sweeping, almost a slow-motion unfurling. Liem talked about the Chinese ambience he wanted to create where energy, control and gracefulness come together. There is one gesture called "Make hands fly like clouds." Their hands fluttered and did seem like drifting clouds. I want to do this!

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Reading Proust. At first overwhelmed, lost in labyrinths of words, sentences. Convolutions, sea shell spirals. Now I am totally absorbed, following the rhythm, revelling in the language. His prose ebbs and flows with the tide, the distant undulation of the sea. A gentle yet inexorable rocking motion. Long, slow, mesmerizing. “The sea was once upon a time our native element, into which we must plunge our cooling blood if we are to recover our strength.”

### **April 5**

Went to York University to enquire about taking courses there. It was a Quixotic journey. After at least two hours of subways, trains and buses, I got lost on campus. It is barren, the buildings all look the same, a baffling assemblage of squares and blocks. An icy wind kept blowing my coat open. Felt like I was tramping through a town in Siberia. After a while it was almost fun walking into dead ends, finding myself at the back entrances of buildings five minutes after passing their entrances. No signs on the buildings, no maps, no students. Finally decided to take shelter in a medical-biological sciences building and discovered the York enquiry service, which is what I was looking for. The whole scene was like a dream. Every place I went turned into some other place. A gymnasium turned into a medical student’s residence, the biology sciences building contained the enquiry service. Nothing was what it appeared to be that day.

Called Sharon from Union Station. Good cheery talk. According to her, Al is hooked on weed. He does it constantly now, even in his parents’ house. He doesn’t go anywhere without toking. But then, this is according to Sharon, who has always been puritanical and hates weed. Al has always enjoyed smoking up, and I remember how he exhorted all of us to read *The Teachings of Don Juan* at Elrond. Everyone is an alcoholic to a teetotaller, so I don’t know how seriously to take this.

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Bob Boden is no longer pastor at the Nazarene Church. He is now chaplain for the Barrie Police Force, someone for them to talk to when they have problems. Glad to hear they are doing that. A little bit of progress.

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Called Jim. We talked for a long time. His sister Suzy had another baby, Vanessa, born March 8 at 9:55 AM. Jim had recently been to New York with Dan. He said that a Uranus-Sun square could make a person (namely me) hard to pin down. Uranus is the planet of change, upheaval, revolution, invention, unconventionality and it colours the sun with its particular vibrations.

### **April 7**

Went to Barrie. Lump in my stomach entering the city through Stroud. Fred and I drove past the Cycle Shop that reminds me of that day Sir Jefforie and I went biking, and he wanted to go there and look at mopeds. A warm timeless day. I can still feel the sun on my shoulders, Sir J beside me.

Every time I go to Barrie, my mother seems smaller, shrinking into her clothes. Her face mask-like, except her eyes, which are poignantly clear and grey. She was vivacious and funny this time.

A relief seeing my father. I was worried about him after reading between the lines of the Boot's last card. But then, all you can do with Boot is read between the lines.

Talked to Sir J. He has been to Dallas twice since we last met. Dallas is a fantasy world for him full of chic beautiful people and social gatherings – a little like West Egg in the Great Gatsby. He still dreams of Eastview, at least twice a week. In these dreams it is usually the first day of school, or else he has been skipping out and forging notes. I am almost always in his school dreams.



Talked to Chris Hopwood. We could have talked all night. She is taking typing classes at Eastview. I don't think I could stand going back there for any reason. I mentioned some of my job experiences and she didn't think she could handle them either. She said we were both sensitive people. Neither of us seem able to develop a tough enough skin. Then she said something I love – we're both all right! There are enough tough aggressive people in the world.

Saw Nancy. She was colouring Easter eggs. There is something about her I really like, but also respect and admire. My parents saw us off as if we were going to sea. It did my heart good to see them like this.

#### **April 11**

Tai Chi lesson with Stuart Liem. It did not go well for me. In fact, I haven't felt as awkward and humiliated since high school phys ed. I cannot seem to follow steps or grasp instructions. I just get mixed, feeling as if I have sixteen arms and legs and using every one in the wrong place. Fred has a natural ability for it. He moved smooth as clockwork. Stewart was very brusque and kept snapping at me. If the whole point of this is relaxation and feeling the flow of your body ...

#### **April 22**

Called Sharon. She sounded belligerent, really down on Al's pot smoking. She told Al I thought it was excessive because she thought my opinion would mean more to him than hers. Apparently, as she told me, Al thinks I'm "just it." Sharon also told me that Marsha is going to call and personally invite me to go to Kingston, because she really wants to see me!

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Went to a Bible study in Toronto with Brenda Cairns, who lives in our apartment building in Whitby. Her eyes are the colour of mineral water. She is easy to talk to, but we don't really connect on any level outside elevator talk. I feel like a rather shady character beside her, but then, most religious people make me feel this way. But I thought I would try this out – I really need new friends, some sort of community.

This christian group was too conservative for me. Barry is a lawyer, Sharon is a lab technician, Linda is a nurse, Brenda and Ewan are both doctors. She and Ewan talked about people who come into their practices asking for abortions. Brenda had "three characters come in scrounging for prescriptions," one a notorious codeine addict, and someone wearing a blue velvet suit with a balding head and scraggly shoulder-length hair. His gestures were nervous and he spied at Brenda as to why he needed Percodin. Suspicious, she left the room to ask someone about him, and later she realized he had stolen her prescription pad.

Next day, I saw her at the elevator, dressed in shades of beige and pale gold; sand glinting in light.

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Visit with Jim in Toronto. A curious off-rhythm day. We spent most of the time with his sister Kathy, which was rather nice because I got to see more of her, and got a better sense of her. She seems very cautious, fearful. It takes her hours to make up her mind whether or not to do something, and she talks continually, fussing and fretting, rationalizing every movement, in constant flux. The three of us went walking along the beach, a soft late afternoon light slanting behind us. We walked companionably. Kathy was much more open than the day I met her. She chatted a great deal as if the lighting, the ambience was sensitive enough for her to open up a little.

We returned to her apartment, which still seems closed and gloomy to me, and she talked about all the ways she would like to get revenge on the guys below her who play loud music. This is a subject I can warm up to and she started to laugh, and yes, there is a glint of mischief in her laugh. She is not as refined as she appears to be.

Jim and I went to see a movie, *Richard's Things* starring Liv Ullmann. Ullmann expresses repressed emotion so wonderfully, undercurrent, seismic forces deep within stilted words and silence. I love deep slow fluid movies like this, movies with mesmerizing photography, where every change in lighting and angle is significant.

Later, Jim told me Kathy had enjoyed being with me, said I was really nice. Pretty too, as appearance always comes up with Jim's sisters.

### **April 23**

Kaleidoscopic day full of events, people, identities.

Met Jim in Toronto. We went to Ward's Island on the ferry. This was lovely. Wind on my face, moving with the water. We wandered about with the ducks and chickens. For a while, I didn't feel like going on to Kingston – could have spend the rest of the day on the island. Jim disturbed me, though. He was upset because I was not wearing the poncho he gave me. I wanted to wear my black coat to Kingston because I knew we were going to a musical. He was petty and authoritarian, fussing over such trivial things. I ate a cookie and he fussed about it, wondered why I wasn't saving it for the train. In so many ways he holds me back, stunts me with his heaviness. He can be incredibly oppressive.

He constantly mentions that no one listens to him. It's a half-joking refrain. I do listen, but I can't live like that. He does say things that are extraordinarily perceptive, but I learn from trial and error experience. So what?! Why should that even matter to him? And really, there are times and places when you may eat a cookie?

Met Sharon at Union Station. We boarded the train to Kingston. She mentioned that Ernie yells at her and gets irritable, moody, and takes it out on her. Ernie likes her because she makes him feel comfortable, yet she says she can't feel comfortable around him. She was standing in the middle of his room eating a piece of cake with a plate under it. He yelled at her and told her to go sit at the table, then proceeded to pick up the six crumbs she dropped. Ernie is a Gemini, quick, moody, easily irritated. Sharon says he likes her better than she likes him. She can't take being yelled at, and she doesn't feel comfortable enough with him to cry when he hurts her.

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Great to see Marsha. She, Sharon and I went to the Top Dog. Marsha said she has sacrificed a lot of her friendships, favourite activities to be with John yet he hasn't given up anything for her. We make a good threesome. I think we complement each other, a good blend of personalities. We give each other space. None of us is, or tries to be dominant.

It was a peaceful, regenerative weekend. Kingston warm and familiar. Long walks down quiet streets full of old houses, the sun making me feel drowsy and peaceful. We walked over to Bellevue House and decided to go on a tour inside, since I had never done it before. Sharon took pictures of Marsha and me and called us her two best friends.

Saturday night we went to see the Pirates of Penzance, put on by the Kingston Meistersingers. Went to the Top Dog again, drank wine and pointed out all the old familiar people still wandering around Kingston. Marsha cooked delicious Chinese food. John went out for his own dinner because he won't eat Chinese food. Marsha often prepares two different meals, one for her and something basic for him.

Weekend over. Sharon and I parted company at Union Station. It had been a lovely weekend.

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Visit with Jim in Kingston. Very uneasy about him these days. His heaviness, his slow rhythm, reluctance to move. Negation of life, spontaneity. His "empty boat" philosophy of life seem to deliberately reproach my rebellious, freedom-loving side. He sees no reason for people to travel – all my life I have wanted to travel all over the world. He wants to live in his parents' house in Lachine. I would feel wretched, trapped, oppressed living in that house. He does not want me to cut my hair. He tells me my shoes and pants are "strange" and my favourite black coat is synthetic. When I show any gumption he accuses me of being a "power-hungry Franny."

He seems to be stifling me in every way. I eat a second cookie and he expected me to have saved it for later – like a repressive father dominating a small child!! No cookies before supper. Everything is reward and punishment. He tells me that instead of going out in the sun I should stay in bed when I am not feeling well. Well, a seeking heart, a lively mind and restless legs will atrophy in a room all day long.

He is buried alive in Kingston, curtains pulled, no light, no air. Hibernation, death. If I did everything he told me to I would be living a perfect sterile existence, no room for mistakes, no chances taken. I suppose I should bow my head in shame over how unevolved I am. When I mentioned liking a song, he said he has never liked violin music because it is too harsh. He ridiculed a concert button I pinned on my satchel-bag. Why, for the love of God? Why so judgmental? I must find my own path. Jim does not want friends, he wants followers, acolytes, and if we're good he'll take us out for ice cream. And if we do not like his brand of ice cream cone we do not know what's good for us.

What might bother me the most is the way he will not put Elrond-me to rest. He reminds me of things I said and did that were foolish and stupid. Who at nineteen is not those things? When he talks about the Elrond days – the OLD Elrond days – I feel as if he has fixed me in a plaster cast. He reminds me of a puerile letter I once wrote him. You thought my letter was puerile - then throw it out! I have never brought up the time he came into my little 910 room at Elrond and said, “What is that awful thing?” He was referring to a travel collage I did in high school and taped to the wall because I liked the colours. After he left I was so ashamed of it I took the collage off the wall and buried it under my bed.

Being with Jim would be a lifetime of deceiving and rebelling against a father or maybe a headmaster. Sharon's take on Jim blew some cobwebs away. She says he's a “typical man with very little self awareness.”

## **May 24**

Fred and I visited Sharon in Toronto and met Ernie for the first time. We went to the Harbourfront flea market and then to a children's art festival. Ernie is very different from Al. He is attentive to Sharon, not undemonstrative like Al. He also has a good sense of humour. There's something distant about Ernie, though. His face doesn't express anything, he doesn't focus on you. His eyes drop away from your face and almost seem to cloud over. He is interested in a wide variety of things, including music, astronomy, shortwave radio. He also plays in a band and has a \$2000 telescope.

We went to Chinatown. I don't think i've ever seen Sharon so playful – she was dancing in the subway! She is usually so respectable. We had a huge Chinese dinner then went back to Ernie's apartment and drank wine. Sharon was crocheting an afghan for one of her friends' babies and Ernie picked up the little crocheted squares, placed them on our heads and called us "crochet-heads." He read to us out of an astrology book, and guessed me to be a Cancer. Apparently, he's a double Gemini-Libra. No wonder he seems difficult for me to pin down or "feel out."

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Jim called. I told him how demoralized and unconfident i've been feeling lately. He told me it's a Mars-Saturn transit and it's going to get worse before it gets better. Then he told me about someone he had met, presumably an astrologer, who said (without ever meeting me) I should be afflicted with migraines, if not now then in the future, and that I should go into research as a profession. Well, sorry to disappoint, but I have never had a migraine and I really don't intend to start now.

Jim said some fascinating things about moon in Capricorn. People with that aspect (me) are self-recriminating. They blame themselves for things that go wrong and always feel that no matter what they do, who they are, that people are not going to like them. That part is true. Jim said Moon in Capricorns manipulate people into creating the same situations in which they continue to feel disliked and inadequate, and this is why I have these negative experiences with people. This is actually quite insightful. Could explain my masochistic relationship with him (and Val).

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The Professor called. Not a masochistic negative relationship! She and Ron came down to Oshawa for the evening to hear a Christian Science speaker. I was curious and went with them. The speaker was dynamic, and as the Professor, pointed out, resembled Richard Dreyfuss, whom we both adored in *The Goodbye Girl*.

The service was interesting. I liked some of the things the speaker said about healing, being a vessel for the spirit of God. He was sincere and fervent and I like the idea of having the spirit of God in me. But then it went a little far. We are pure and beautiful in the sight of God, but all else are illusions. Disease, filth, perversion, corruption exist only because they are perceived as existing. Humans see the world a certain way, as if we are all wearing sunglasses. If we were to take the sunglasses off, we would become full of the Spirit of God and no longer perceive evil things. Then they would no longer exist. Some of this seems psychologically sound, good old positive thinking. But let's just say I have a boatload of questions about the whole concept of illusion. I also have no patience for the reverence they show Mary Baker Eddy. They study her book in conjunction with the Bible, consider it the "key to the scriptures."

But it was interesting, a glimpse into the Professor's faith, and part of her world I never knew. After the talk, she, Ron and I went to the Dairy Queen. Had such a good time. I've missed her humour and dramatic flair so much. Ron was getting into the spirit of things. He seems to be joining our merriment more and more all the time.

## **June 11**

Went with Fred, Sharon and Ernie to see Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. Joe Clark and Maureen McTeer were there. *The Dinner Party* was impressive with gorgeous place settings, plates with beautiful coloured designs of vaginas. The exhibit ended with Georgia O'Keefe's unfinished setting. I guess it symbolizes that women's evolution is unfinished. It is a grand work of art, turns women's history into an homage, a rich pageant. And how appropriate it should be a dinner party, food, feeding, nurturance.

## June 12-13

I was not expecting to hear from anyone until 11 o'clock this morning but Marsha called at 9:00 to say she was at the train station. We bought a two litre of red wine and returned to the apartment. Fred made a salad. Wheeze and Fred spread the crazy quilt on the floor and had fresh bread, salads and wine all spread out. Such a bright spontaneous happening. Marsha and I downed glass after glass of wine. We talked and talked. We talked about first year Queens, and how completely lost we had both felt. Learned that Marsha's father's mother drowned herself. Her father told her he had a dream about it, and that he felt guilty because he had not acted on the dream. Then after he told Marsha this, he denied he ever said that. In turn, I told her my mother's father had shot himself just before I was born.

We talked about relatives and madness. I became aware of the darkness that existed all around us, how we talk, trying to bring our words up from the depths, trying to build word bridges across overwhelming darkness. She talked about her father, how disturbed he is, and how everyone tells her she is so much like him. Out of all the six Smith kids, she was the most like him, a difficult child who wailed and threw tantrums. She is so afraid of being like him. The world became a blur after that, a dark tide. We danced like dervishes, a ritual, release from the underworld. We tossed popcorn on the mat, danced on the couch. Marsha washed her clothes in the sink and we continued the dance in our pyjamas.

Next morning I found spilled wine, popcorn, a knocked over plant. Tiny clues to our mysterious rites of the night before. Standing on the shoreline gathering up relics, clues to lost continents, sunken worlds. The only thing I can picture clearly is Marsha dancing on the couch in her pyjamas during the flood.

Went to Pickering flea market, picnicked at the conservation area in the rain. Marsha charming today. Every so often I would turn my head and see a bright-eyed Wheezel-face peering between the seats. Fred and I said goodbye to her at the train station.

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Noisy apartment, 1:00 a.m. Bass pounding through the concrete beams in the walls. Fred and I drove to a quiet road and slept in the car. Raining, streetlights reflected on river streets. We drove into fog. Spent a wonderful night listening to wind and rain.



## June 28

Went to Seneca College today. Reading Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, on the bus and train. Felt my own mind turn into a labyrinth. I could imagine myself existing at once in different dimensions. I could be the character who went to sleep and dreamed a human being into existence and then found out I myself had been dreamed by someone else. That book is like a drug. While heading into Union Station, I found myself extraordinarily aware of sights and sounds around me, all human-created, all extensions of ourselves. Multicoloured pipes like arteries, skeletons of buildings, railway ties piled like bones in the pale light. All of this comes out of ourselves, bringing our own interior workings out, projected, built to a monstrous size, formed out of cement, steel, iron, etc.

So our living bodies become rigid, huge, grinding away far above us. We have built labyrinths in the world, out of ourselves, and we're all lost in our own gigantic creations. I often come across Freud's concept of the "death wish." I've never really understood what that means. I wonder if this comes at all close to it – taking the body, the living organs, pumping all the life-blood out of it and rendering it gigantic, like the heads on Easter Island.

Finally reached Seneca College, which made me feel claustrophobic. Coming here would be like going back to high school, the same kind of dimly lit building, rows and rows of orange lockers. I was completely disoriented. The admin assistant treated me as if I were a Yeti, straight from the primeval forest.

On the way back, the Go train broke down. The lights switched off, the train slowed and stopped. The water was luminous, pearl-white, everyone silent. All of the usual train noises had ceased. It was as if we had all died along with the train, and that we were not really people sitting there. We were replacements, body-doubles from another planet. I started laughing and that broke the ice. Eventually a man smiled at me and others started laughing and rolling their eyes. There was a whooshing sound, the long panels of light overhead flickered on and off. Finally a greenish light, and we took off again.

## July 2

Curiously disaffected letter from Val. Lately it seems we are sending filler back and forth to each other, deliberately trying not to reveal our real thoughts and feelings. I think one of the reasons people dislike Val is because she openly expresses feelings other people hide and repress. People recognize themselves in the things Val says and they don't like it, so they say she is neurotic and insecure. Val brings emotions out in the open that most people, including myself, conceal or deny. I am envious of her freedom and courage. Val says her epitaph will be one word: WHY? Mine will be: I DON'T KNOW.

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Toronto with Fred. Saw a French movie, *A Week's Vacation*. I love European movies. They are softly lit, sensual, rhythmic. This is a film about a teacher who is deeply questioning herself and her job. I was especially moved by her rebellion against the shallowness of the TV generation. At one point she told some students they would all be old by the time they were 20. The film gently probes character and never descends into caricature or sentimentality. The teacher returns to school because she needs to feel astonished, so she won't grow old, rigid, dogmatic in her thinking. I left the theatre feeling both thoughtful and uplifted in a subtle way.

At midnight Fred and I drove down a long winding road through the trees. We passed a white church that looked mysterious in the moonlight. Fairytale walk into a forest. I could smell pine resin and glowing white moonflowers.

## July 6

Went for my Library Tech interview at Seneca College. The interviewer, Dan Alchuk, reminded me of Irving Layton. While filling out my application some confidence came back. I had been haunted by Boot's failures, unable to separate myself from her. The old notion of bad blood, crappy DNA, family curses, etc, etc. But while filling out the form I realized I do have life experience and Mr Alchuk said he thought I was someone who knew what I was doing.

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Sharon has decided she likes unicorns. She seems to make conscious decisions whether or not to like things. When she does decide she likes something she becomes quite dogmatic about it. When she, Marsha and I went shopping, Sharon bought a poster because it had a unicorn on it. It was a bit creepy, depicting a unicorn rearing back from a snake. She bought it anyway, snake or no snake, because it had a unicorn on it. Any unicorn would do.

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Fred bought a new car, a maroon Subaru.

## July 11

Fred's brother Eric visited. He is quiet and gentle but authoritarian. He weighs and measures everything said and pronounces his opinion on it. I made salmon souffle and since we don't have a table large enough to seat three, we ate on the floor, sitting around the Indian mat. This is the nice, adaptable side of Eric I really like. I wish he didn't have to spoil things by making digs the way his mother does. Actually, Fred does the same. It's a family trait. Must admit I never feel any great urge to see more of his family. But at least Eric's an easy guest and he's never been mean to me, at least not to my face.

## July 12

Weekend in Barrie. Went to a play at Georgian College – my father's idea. *Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii*. A comedy, but interesting on another level. The main character, Vivien, is a romance novelist transposes her life into her novel, using "Nurse Jane" as her alter-ego. The novelist records everything she hears into her tape recorder and soon starts believing she is Nurse Jane, and is indeed in Hawaii. Her lover's wife becomes the wicked Tandalea. A domestic quarrel around a bridge table becomes a deadly duel on the rim of a volcano. Cheese dreams (I remember those from grade 7 home ecch) become suckling pig.

The play ends sadly, though. Vivien's lover decides his wife is a gem after all and Vivien spends the night on the couch speaking into her tape recorder, giving Nurse Jane another happy ending. Yes, it was fun but also poignant, and said some very interesting things about writing, reality and the imagination. How porous the border is, how easy it is to slip back and forth.

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Went to the Nazarene Church. Peaceful. Soft light filtering through the crushed glass windows. Warmth and intimacy. All the things I love about it, and why I went every Sunday all through high school. The Bodens now have a very young daughter. Donna Boden looks tired. She has put on a little weight but looks more delicate somehow. She looked strained, frowning slightly. I never saw her look anything but cheerful at church.

I also went to the evening service. We sang and Bob talked about how people involve themselves in a flurry of activity to avoid listening, to avoid confronting someone else's pain. He laughs at people who use the term "bleeding-heart," says our hearts should bleed more often, that there are so many things in the world that "we" should care about. We should weep and never stop caring. A warm light slanted through the window, and I felt like I was home. I didn't idealize this place, I didn't just hear what I wanted to hear.

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Speaking of listening, I was sitting on the porch swing trying to while away Sunday between church services, when my father sat down beside me. This is highly unusual – it has never happened before. We talked. We never talk. He doesn't know what to do with the "middle two" (Boot and Jim). He is especially frustrated with Boot because he thought she had the opportunity and could have done it. He's very proud of Nancy and loses no opportunity to brag about her marks at school and seemed very pleased about my upcoming Library Tech training.

I also got my wish about getting him alone to tell him about the novel I was writing. Actually, I told him I was working on a project which I hoped would be finished by September. He said mischievously, “Your book.” And I confessed. So I guess I was right about his tacit knowledge and support. He didn’t even ask me what it was about, said they’d find out when it was published, or when I was sent to Hollywood to do a film adaptation. This is kind of a breakthrough. I’ve never felt comfortable with my father, we have never been able to just sit down and talk like two normal people. This was pretty special and I hope this means the gap is closing.

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“When the samba takes you /Out of nowhere  
And the background’s fading /Out of focus  
Yes, the picture’s changing /Every moment  
And your destination You don’t know it”  
-(Bryan Ferry, “Avalon”)

## July 16

Montreal! Beautiful drive down Highway 2. Signs for St-Zotique, St-Tellesphore, St-Polycarpe and then the swooshy highways and bridges around Pte-Claire. I love this place so much. The air seems softer, the buildings not as high, a more human scale. Soft greys and browns, brick, stone. A colourful quirky city with spiral staircases, yellow doors, blue railings. Full of little nooks and quirks. St-Denis, Duluth, St-Laurent. Lopsided buildings, stairways that look like tunnels. Old wooden fences, hollyhocks. St-Urbain, Vieux-Montreal. Bagel Factory. Went over the mountain and saw the streets flowing down, gleaming in the rain. Ste-Catherine lively as usual. I was trying to picture Yonge St and could only think of the astrological clock. Black with the zodiacal signs painted in white, with hands pointing at two of the symbols. In Toronto it’s always Libra before Sagittarius.

Went to an André Gagnon concert in a venue on the waterfront, for two dollars. The music was soft, riverine, then grew livelier and he bounced manically across the stage, dressed all in white. The instruments looked icy as if they were all made of glass. Man and His World in the background. The dome, lacy and silver-grey. A building beside the stage, fragile in the dusky light as if made of tissue from a hornet's nest. A silvery half-light.

Spoke with Jim once. A peculiar phone call. Distant. We didn't really connect. I felt the distance and tried to think of things to say to bring us closer together, but it seemed as if I had disrupted his day and shouldn't have called. Talking out of turn, I suppose.

Returned via Highway 2. I cried as I always do when I have to leave. Long Sault Parkway. Trees swishing like restless ghosts. A wild ghostly evening. Darkening sky, roistering wind.

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Read an article about John Hinckley Jr. The writer described him as "a larva, a grub, the soft white underbelly of the American Dream." It seems that that is how older people would describe everyone my age and younger. It also seems as if there is a huge difference between us and those who are five years older.

## **July 30**

Montreal again. I can almost believe I lived there in another life. I loved this city from the first moment I set foot in it. Old buildings, lacy black balconies, spiral staircases, peeling porches, ghostly-rustling streets. Fronts of houses propped up like movie sets. In the dark dream-light a tiny black and white cat on a window sill. Tendril of an ivy plant slithering down an upstairs window. Portuguese neighbourhood. Creamy white building, open door, long pale green hallway, flushed red light coming from a lightbulb above the door. A girl stood in the doorway, a soft bluish figure with long gold leaf earrings. She looked around, as if expecting someone, then went running back into the building, down the hall.

Fred and I walked up a ruelle past a dense brick building. I stopped, struck by a yeasty old bakery-garbage smell I remembered from Europe. The schloss, in Mittersill. We continued our way down the ruelles. Peeling balconies, false bottoms, matchstick walls. Buildings so narrow, I marvelled over how they contained rooms, families, lives. Barrie has never made me feel the way this city does. I dream about Montreal. Went to Cheap Thrills. Talked about Kobo Abe with the young woman at the cash.

On to St-Denis and browsed through galleries and shops. Saw a Richard Avedon photo exhibit. Some striking photos. A little too posed and controlled for me. Some of it seemed like glorified news photography. Some portraits of subjects, such as Isak Dinesen or Ezra Pound, look as if they have been embalmed. Giant plaster monuments. Maybe portrait photography just isn't something I can appreciate.

Went to Ésoterie. Someone barred the door, stopped us from leaving and talked to us about the beautiful music of Kitaro. Wine and seafood bisque at a café. Two little gravel streets fanning out from a corner way up on St-Denis. Reminded me of the Wild West, could imagine a shoot-out in the middle of the street. Honeycomb of apartments, catacombs, grottoes. Sat on the curb and heard Rickie-Lee Jones's *Pirates* emanating from one of the buildings. *Pirates* sounding down an old silent street full of shadows.

Slept in the woods at Île Bizard.

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St-Denis at night. A tide of people curling up and down the street. People like planets, surrounded by invisible galaxies, one star in the middle of a constellation of all the people they know. Constellations in moving tidal darkness. One band playing across the street, a second singing christian songs on the corner, the music in the café where we are sitting. Good talk with Fred about Elrond, self-consciousness. We have both spent summers drifting like lost souls. We stayed in the café for two hours.

Wound along the river the river on Lakeshore Drive to the West Island. Romano's for pizza. We went to Fred's old neighbourhood in Beaconsfield and we wandered the streets, through little paths that led into schoolyards, his old territory. He was feeling nostalgic, reflective, a sliver of moonlight surrounded by clouds. The one who held me that night by the water in Pointe-Claire and told me I was the only one he loved. I wish I could take him through the woods and paths where I grew up, but none of it exists any more. I can't think too much about it – the whole thought of my whole childhood world gone is unbearable.

### **Aug. 5**

Fred assigned to photograph Dinah Christie in an Oshawa bar. I have seen her on TV, the CBC, possibly Front Page Challenge. She is very professional and larger-than-life. Her head is massive, hair unbelievably (at least to me) thick and abundant, features well-formed like a bust. She made everyone else look small and sparse. The bar itself was dark, decorated with car parts and pipes. Masses of red pipes coiled like intestines. Contrast with the clinical metallic tables rimmed in a cool light, and gleaming hub caps on the walls. Rather nightmarish. Seemed surreal to see Dinah Christie performing in this venue.

A random man stopped Fred and ranted at him for braking in front of him. Lately I have been seeing so many screechy-tense people, moving like clockwork. Brittle, depleted people. People who look shell-shocked walking through the shopping centres. It seems as if people in general have fewer inner resources, no reservoirs of strength, hope, thought or imagination.

### **Aug. 7**

Joan, who works in Fred's office, wants me to do her astrological chart because she thinks I'm down-to-earth and astute. I am pretty sure she thinks that because I was dressed in brown when we met. Met her at the Oshawa shopping centre. Reddish hair. Features sharp, fox-like yet oddly out of focus.



Warm, friendly, easy to talk to, easy to be familiar with. I have worked out her planets (Nov. 2, 1952). I guessed she was a Sagittarius, but she has Mercury and Venus there, so I wasn't far off. I was right about her Ascendant being in Aquarius. So now I will draw the chart and let it sit for a while so I can get used to it and let it speak to me. Now I hear that someone else in Fred's office is interested in having a chart done.

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Sharon called. We are both very concerned about Marsha. Her behaviour has been very erratic lately. She's been taking tantrums over trivial things. According to Sharon, Marsha yelled at a police officer because he had underestimated the towing charge on John's car. She flew into a rage at John because he went to the Portsmouth and forgot to leave a key out for her. It seems she has been acting like her father, flying into irrational rages over trivialities.

### **Aug. 20**

Farewell card from Jim. He has every right to be upset with me as I have not been honest. However he is also not fair to me. When he talks about all "his sacrifices" he sounds too much like Val for me to take them seriously. There has always been something not quite real about his love for me. He certainly seemed to complain a lot about the real person living underneath his fantasy. He's right. I have not made much of an effort to return to Montréal. But, he's made no attempt to come to me. I am expected to go there. It is never reciprocal. I love Montréal but I need to get some kind of career training. Being this close to Toronto is the best place to do that.

I should have been honest with him – a long time ago. I never really believed in his love. Our relationship was often beautiful, magical and inspiring, but he wasn't any more physically attracted to me than I was to him. I was not ever sexually attracted to him, and in fact, find him oppressive. Time and time again I choose Fred over Jim. All I know is that leaving after spending any length of time with Jim is like escaping a repressive father.

Tickling sessions, inertia. Why was Jim always tickling me? I realize that I am somehow rebelling against a large oppressive authority. Jim has this teasing streak that comes too close to bullying. And always the withdrawal, the disapproval, that I have to mind my ps and qs or he withdraws affection. I loved and respected Jim, almost sitting at his feet, until I had to rebel. The pattern of this relationship was of drawing close for a while, then taking flight after feeling suffocated.

I'm drained. I can't cry any more about him. I have gone to ridiculous emotional heights and depths over him. I have nothing left. I also feel curiously detached. Relieved? Maybe some friendships aren't worth keeping. Maybe I've changed. At any rate, I think I have learned something. Real life is not an Anaïs Nin journal. You can't box real people in a ideal platonic fantasy world.

#### **Aug. 24**

Yesterday Fred went to photograph police search-and-rescue incident at a boating accident. It was a wan cool light, wind riffling through cattails. A bearded man, wrapped in a blanket, leaned against a police car. Fred was getting his camera gear out and the man came over and threatened Fred. He pushed Fred and told him in no uncertain terms to put the camera away. "What do you think this is, a fucking sideshow?"

I was stunned. He was one of the survivors, and I thought he was right. Or at least, I would have thought exactly the same. What right do these media reporters and photographers have to prey on individual tragedies? Why are these events published in newspapers in the first place? Fred slunk to the scene through another back trail. I couldn't have continued. Guess that's why I'm not in the news industry.

#### **Aug. 25**

Touching letter from Val. Nostalgic. "School starts for both of us real soon eh. I wish it was like it was with Kingston, the two of us skipping classes. I miss you a lot, you know. i've got friends, but it's hard to do without someone who's been a part of my life for gooder or badder (some hanglish eh?)" Couldn't have said it any better.

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Poetic justice department. The bank manager, who refused to give Fred and my parents a car loan, claiming none of us made enough money, was arrested for theft over two hundred dollars and fraud over two hundred dollars by making phony loan applications and shuffling money between accounts. He had apparently just begun his career as a fraudster when Fred applied for the car loan. No wonder he behaved so strangely when we all met – just like a Simenon character.

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Curious old bookstore inside a Dickensian building with bars on the windows. Inside, dead quiet, smell of musty books. Large no smoking sign on the wall, a woman sitting at the counter, smoking. She had very sharp dark eyes and although she was busy, she seemed to notice our every move. I found some Simenons. She said it was nice to see other fans of Simenon and we talked about the Maigrets and his other books. Like me, she likes S's other books, while Fred prefers the Maigrets. We slipped down the creaking stairs, leaving the woman alone, surrounded by phantoms.

### **Sept. 3**

Sharon called to tell me Marsha wants to come and visit on the weekend of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Funny how Marsha, like Al, always goes through Sharon to get to me. Sometimes it seems as if I live deep in a cave guarded by Cyclopes and only certain messengers with a password can get through the huge stone gates into the inner chamber where I reside, curled up like a minotaur.

Things looking bleak for Sharon right now. It looks as if her school will be shut down because of a mistake she made. She talked a lot about Reality. I haven't told her about going back to school yet. When I told her I was thinking about doing it, she demanded to know why. I wonder what it is with all of us. Maybe Sharon's right, we bear the Elrond brand on our foreheads, and are all doomed to flounder through life.

### Sept. 5

Val phoned tonight. She is having a very hard time with her mother and Matt. Matt is playing games with her and doesn't seem to care very much about the relationship. She is lonely and frightened, and I felt so inadequate, able only to utter platitudes. We reminisced to the point where we both almost started crying on the phone. She told me how much she missed me, how other people were just pale imitations and that she thinks about me all the time. I said similar things in response.

She melts my heart. She breaks down my reserves. On my part, I listen without judging, I understand emotion and most of all, I *get* her. Neither of us has anyone who fills the need we have for each other as friends. It was a wistful, emotionally intense conversation. We affirmed how much we care for each other. She told me there was a little Sagittarian who would always care for me.

### Sept. 6

Sharon visited from Toronto for the day. Val yesterday, today Sharon. Am I a cheat?! Sharon and I talked for most of the afternoon. Easily, naturally - a good visit. Later, we walked down to the bus together, neither of us leading, just somehow moving in the same direction.

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Unpleasant dreams about Jim. One night I dreamed Jim had become a Moonie and was dressed in some kind of robe or loose pants. His hair was done up in a braid that dangled from the top of his head. He was leading Fred and me around a place that was supposed to be McGill but didn't look anything like it. It was covered in snow and we were freezing, but Jim was completely indifferent to our feelings.

Another dream about Jim. Boot and I were in his Volvo along with Joyce Arduini (?!) and a guy named Karl, who we picked up. Go figure that this would not end well. Jim was driving and he would not tell us where we were going. We picked up another guy named Murray. It was Karl who Jim objected to, however, and every twenty kms or so he would threaten to eject him from the car. A couple of times he did kick Karl out, but one of us would sneak him back into the car again. Oh yes, Karl was also a spy, working for some intelligence agency. That bit probably came from reading John Le Carré. I guess what made this dream creepy rather than farcical was the way it was Jim's car and he just kept driving, staring stonily out the window.

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Read a nightmare Simenon, *The Murderer*. I haven't been able to shake it yet. Excruciating and terrifying step-by-step dissolution of personality.

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School tomorrow. New start, new life. This time I won't screw up.

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Unsettling week. I really dislike Seneca College, as an environment. Way too much like high school, windowless, a sealed vacuum with no oxygen in the classrooms. Hallways wind like labyrinths into cul-de-sacs. They are a haze of smoke, cigarette burns all over the floors. Claustrophobic. Good group of people in my class though.

I take the bus home after classes with Maria Buisman, who lives right in Whitby, a stop farther than me. She gets a ride in every morning at 7:00 and she looks exhausted. We have nothing in common, but she's quite nice and good company. We both pull out our books and read, avoiding awkward small-talk.

Thursday was a good day. Finally felt I was doing the right thing. Stella Montague looks like her name, trim, tidy, with scrabbly little hands. Anxious owlish expression. She thinks I'm an oddity and is always laughing at me. My favourite classmate is Joanne Montemurro. She is a sweetheart. Sensitive, humorous, understanding. We've already had some good talks about how much we hated high school. I don't think her friend Ellen Ryan is very impressed with me, though.

Friday, a kaleidoscope of impressions, moods. Talked a lot with Linda Partington, who has taken courses at UBC then ate lunch with the four class "cools." They were astonished by my doodles. Then, last period of the day, a ridiculous history course I couldn't get out of in spite of all the history classes I took at Queen's, I had to sit on the floor right by a folding partition. I sat gazing up at table tops and there was a class on the other side of the partition making strange grunting sounds.

The room was airless, and the thundering of Mr Boom mingled with the noises beyond the partition almost made me pass out. I couldn't even sneak out because Mr Boom was standing against the door with his arms folded, and he is very large and intimidating. Maybe he knew we would all leave unless he guarded the threshold.

Marsha phoned from Cobourg. Change of plans. She is arriving tonight instead of the 18<sup>th</sup>.

## **Sept. 11**

Wheeze, F and I trundled around picking up food and drink for a picnic, which was interrupted by copulating insects dropping from the sky onto our food. After that, on to AL Leake's party. Al was irritating, seemed rather smug. Marsha, Chris Hope and I had a good time. Sharon was depressed. She says we are all getting old and if we haven't found someone by the time we are in our late-twenties we are doomed to loneliness and misery.

Al says she calls him and all she does is talk in a monologue about how depressing her life is. She does the same to Marsha. I also get some of it, but it seems that Marsha and Al get full-on Sharon. She has lost a lot of weight since Elrond days, looks very striking, a sculpture.

Marsha was belligerent tonight. She was telling us about how she had told someone off, in a tone of such defiance, Sharon and I just looked at each other. Marsha spied on about how she was tougher now, a “tough Wheeze.” I like the old Wheeze just fine, thank you. And why are people always resolving to become tougher and more “honest?” Why doesn’t anyone ever resolve to be kinder or quieter?

The party split into factions. I drank Chris Hope’s bourbon without flinching – straight up! Chris and I started bouncing around on someone’s waterbed until we all got thrown out of the apartment. Sharon very pointedly disapproved of Marsha and my drunken behaviour. We were dancing and playing someone’s drums. I talked to Al, but don’t remember anything I said. We drove Sharon to Ernie’s apartment. He wasn’t there so we left her alone in a barren apartment. She stood in the hall, in a sterile blue light, which eerily reflected her mood. Marsha and I returned to Whitby sometime after 5 a.m.

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Marsha’s face is always in motion, her eyes bright, full of life. She was lovely company. She, F and I were the 3 Musketeers all weekend. Went for a walk. Hazy outside. Fog nuzzling around us, sky a red smear. Suddenly two bats fell from the sky, right in front of us, a shrill scree-ee sound. Marsha and I jumped and I screamed. On closer examination (as they say) it turned out that the bats were copulating. We left them to it. Went to see ET. Marsha and I sniffled all the way through it. She stayed Sunday night and left Monday morning after I left for school.

There seems to be a lot of hostility between Marsha and Sharon. Marsha becomes more belligerent and defiant when Sharon is around, tells more of her “tough Wheeze” stories. Sharon, on the other hand, always seems to disapprove of Marsha’s behaviour than mine. She will directly confront Marsha, and state things like, “You’re drunk.” Sharon never does that to me, not to my face anyway.

## Sept. 16

Every time I enter the Seneca College building I feel as if i'm stepping backwards into high school. My emotions are fluctuating, slightly off-station. This has been a topsy-turvy month of unsettled emotions, mood swings. For a while the weather was hot, humid, stifling. Now it is cold and miserable. The classrooms are sealed, suffocating. The exterior is dismal, utilitarian little cubes. Commuting into Toronto every day by bus is a new experience. Before school, it was a treat. Now it is a tedious necessity, and I don't understand how people can live their lives this way. Stop-and-go on a six-lane highway. Sweep of grey and barren. Homesick for Montreal, the 191 that wends its way through Lachine, weaving through narrow streets between old apartments, big trees, schools, taverns, etc.

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Joanne and I sat together in English watching silly films, joking, playing imaginary violins, lampooning the music on the film. Every time we looked at each other we would start laughing. She's also feeling unsettled, uncertain. She says she is not a "group person," groups just make her feel left out. Mika G. is interesting, distant somehow, moving in her own world. She is fair with soft features, heavy-lidded eyes and big glasses which make her look dreamy. She sighs a lot, frets over details. Always sympathetic and helpful, though.

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Had to run for the Go bus at 6:30 this morning, only to find we were given a spare. Gah. A group of us sat in the lounge and Mika, Joanne, Nancy Dewdney and I traded stories of Europe. Mika belongs to a Ukrainian dance troupe that is planning a trip to Europe. Nancy is keen, alert. Her face changes expression as she acts out her stories. So interesting. Lynn Sinclair is quick, ironic.



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Beautiful, poignant letter from Val. "I hope to be able to get up to see you soon. Maybe we can weep fond tears all over our memories and some small beautiful flower will grow up to be an everlasting memory of us." She sees herself as being a helpless victim acted on by hostile, conspiring forces. When she appears high and happy, she is usually hurting inside. When she is in the most emotional pain, her humour emerges like a joyous little flame. I think we will be strange little old ladies together. This is a deep psychic connection.

### **Sept. 25**

F and I drove north for the weekend to see the autumn colours. Stopped in Barrie. Phoned Chris Hopwood and had a good talk. She is taking Gerontology extension courses from Ryerson College, thinking that will be a good long-range plan as she eventually wants to work with senior citizens. Confessed some of my fears and doubts about school, especially the money aspect, in my case, and she has been going through the same thing.

She told me in her direct, sincere way that I had so much potential and so much to give that it would be a waste to do jobs that require no skills or ability. I got the feeling she was talking about herself as well as me when she said that. She said she really appreciated the letter I sent. We understand when we don't always respond promptly to each other.

Visited the Professor in Orillia. Called Sir Jefforie and we had the best talk in a long time. Non-stop for an hour, laughing, tossing in our old jokes and quotations. His sense of humour remains, also his vulnerability and desire to be accepted. Also his attraction to the unattainable. He reaches out to people, attends these "socials," wants to be loved and admired then withdraws again, not contacting anyone. Reaching out and withdrawing. His attraction to the ideal – he may be the biggest dreamer of us all.

River running copper, blazing leaves, dark green firs, blue roads streaking around the rocks of Muskoka. Deep red sumacs spreading up into the hills. Slept in the car. All green and blue around me.

### **Oct. 1**

Invited for chicken dinner with Ellen and Joanne. Ellen is tall and walks proudly. She is loyal and protective and makes a point of being nice and polite to everyone, especially those who seem a little lost. At the same time she remains aloof, walks ahead of us. She has a degree in Medieval Studies from U of T and she loves the novels of Jane Austen. Things with form, propriety, social norms. She is very much a leader. She wears clean crisp clothes that look almost like private school uniforms. And everyone in the class looks up to her as Head Girl.

Ellen and I went to speak to Mr Boom to try to get out of his ridiculous history elective. We even volunteered to do an independent project but no luck. We couldn't move him. I suspect he doesn't want to lose his captive audience.

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Uneasy full moon. Hills swooping up and down. Passed a police car that was chasing a green pick-up truck at full pursuit. Made it out into our trails and saw another green pick-up stealing into the woods. Fred started telling me stories about the BC murderers travelling across the country in a pick-up with BC license plates without being caught. This is exactly what I want to hear at night in the trails. Every time I got out of the car I imagined hands snatching me from behind trees. The sumacs fringing the road dripping with blood. Thud of grouse somewhere in the woods.

### **Oct 4**

Gave Joanne a birthday card. She was thrilled, and kissed me on the cheek in class. I'm so grateful for this simple warmth after all the complexities of Val, Sharon etc. So happy to have a friend for whom I can feel love and affection without always being rocked by darker feelings, manipulation. Back to the innocence of the Professor days when there was nothing except the happiness of liking someone and having that person like me back.

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Talked to Sharon. She was bright and cheerful as if Al's party had never happened. She is never in the same mind twice when I talk to her. When she is depressed as she was at the party, I can expect the opposite next time I talk to her. I have to be on my toes with her

She talked about how weird Marsha's behaviour was at the party, her tough image, and the tirades she takes over trivial matters. Not a word from Sharon about her own depression and telling us we were all getting old and it was about time we "faced up to reality." Personally, I would like to tell Sharon that I am not old and I'm completely with Marsha on living as young and crazy a life as possible. On the other hand, I would like to tell Marsha I'm not particularly interested in any "new tough Wheezes."

### **Oct. 8**

On the subway with five classmates when someone sitting right across from me got my attention. It was Pete Kerr, infamous skanky BMOC at Queen's. He was dressed (appropriately) in a business suit. It took me a while before I recognized him. He told me he works in Finance. He chattered about nothing and called me Laura, yet he pressed his phone number and address, complete with postal code, on me. He talked me into going with him for a drink, so I went, emphasizing that I had to catch the 5:00 bus and I couldn't miss it as I was going to Montreal for the weekend.

We talked about movies, then he reminisced over how he used to see me all the time at Queen's, around Earl Hall. Said he had always wanted to get to know me. Well, when we were at Queen's, he went out with my friend, Lynn Thurston; he had absolutely no interest in me whatsoever. I remember him as being shallow and conceited at Queen's, but today he was very nice and polite. He walked me back to the subway, insisted I call or drop by his place so we could go to a movie or get Chinese food. Kind of an odd, wistful, very surprising meeting. I'm still amazed he recognized me on public transit.

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Letter from Val. “I hurt, I am in pain, I am confused. I love not for the present circumstances but for the past. The arrow the Cupid shot was gold-plated lead and I have rejected the love of the true in my lust for a shadow.”

Called Val. She was pensive for the first part of the call, then she blatantly pumped me for information. The grasping, manipulative side of Val came out. Her voice became high-pitched, breathless and artificial. I ceased to matter any more to her. I was important only for what I could tell her about Al. The worst part was that I jumped through her hoop. I told her I had seen him, he had thrown a party, he moved into an apartment with his friend Ace.

Talk about being used. I feel I betrayed a friend by caving into Val’s inability to let go, her desire to hold onto all grudges. I wish I could hold fast to what I think is right. I wish I was not so eager to please that I sell out to anyone. I sell plastic baggies filled with parts of myself. I take bribes, money slipping into my hand as I stand and smile with vacant eyes. I hate what Val brings out in me. I hate her for what she shows me about myself, betrayals, deceit, tightrope walking, bland smiling faces and concealed weapons.

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Another call from Val. Matt told her she couldn’t stay with him in Kingston because his parents did not want her there. She was deeply hurt – who wouldn’t be. But she sets herself up, entering the same idealistic Camelot relationship with the same unattainable or unfeeling man over and over again. She said she called me because I was the only friendly voice she could talk to. Then she asked for Marsha’s address.

### **Oct. 15**

As soon as Marsha, F and I reached the Top Dog, I knew the weekend would be difficult. The first person I saw was Val, gazing spiritlessly out the window. Her hair looked stiff as if sprayed. She wore one of her dickies with a cameo brooch. We came in, hoping to add some fresh air. She didn’t say a word about the present or future, didn’t seem interested or receptive to what we were doing. She looked as if she were made of plaster.

After so many years she still can't forgive Sharon, digs for any tidbits about Al. Still talks about conspiracies, being ostracized, people who were supposedly either for or against her. She still jabs me for not sticking up for her with "the group" - a group that existed only in her own mind. I once lived in a coop called Elrond. I had some friends - Val, Al, Marsha, Sharon, Jim, Fred. The end.

On Saturday we met Matt and got very drunk at the Top Dog. Matt was very quiet, but for some reason Val kept referring to him as her "embarrassing boyfriend" and compared him to Al - while Matt was sitting there. I felt bad for him and went off to play Pac Man with Fred. We finally left the Top Dog, tootled down Princess Street to the Pilot House. For the first time it seemed as if we would come together and salvage the weekend. After the good cheer at the Pilot House we decided to go and eat. Val insisted on going to the one place Marsha did not like. We walked all over town in the cold and dark trying to find a substitute, but Val insisted on her choice. Wheeze stalked off. Upon returning to her apartment we found a cryptic note on the door, telling us to come in and make ourselves at home. It didn't mention where she was or when she would be back.

Val, Matt, Fred and I were sitting at Wheeze's apartment. Val turned on the TV. The phone rang. I answered, thinking it might be Wheeze. It was Sharon. Of course it was. Sharon was naturally surprised to hear my voice and we talked for a while. After the call ended, Val deluged me with reproach, saying that things were not over. After all these years the mess was going on, and she (Val) was still being persecuted. All this because Sharon wanted to talk to Marsha.

Wheeze returned and we went to the Portsmouth. More drinking. I started feeling glum and surly, and finally stood up and said I had to go for a walk. Marsha wanted to find a party so we drove around campus fruitlessly looking for a party. Marsha opened the windows asking people where there was a party. Everyone laughed. It was dark, leaves falling over the car. I felt detached, surreal. A drunken student approached us, and Marsha hollered something out the window to the effect that the person was too young to approach us like that. Then she tiraded about Sharon's puritanical behaviour at Al's party. Back at the apartment, we all slunk off to our separate compartments.

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Next morning I was glad to see the sun. Fred and I lay together on the fold-out couch. Val came in dressed in her flannel nightgown and sat on the bed. We talked. The barriers dissolved and I was disarmed. I could never stay angry at Val wearing her flannel nightgown. Matt came out and the four of us lay on the bed.

Everyone awake and milling around the breakfast table. I went for a walk on campus. Queen's as pretty and cloistered as ever. Since it was Homecoming Week, students were with distinguished silver-haired parents, who all looked intelligent and civilized. Fred and Wheeze picked me up at the John Deutsch cafeteria. The five of us went to Wolfe Island. While there, Wheeze confided about how miserable the weekend had been, hoping it wasn't obvious she was avoiding Val. She feels she and Val have nothing in common any more. While I was walking through campus, Val criticized Marsha's breakfast and insulted her Chinese food dinner. Wheeze and I in small alliances, a glance, an expression. Cross-currents. And so we strained and rubbed against each other all weekend.

At Wolfe Island we stopped at an abandoned house with open windows and doors. I stood outside watching colourful people moving from room to room, moving on different levels, like an Escher print. We picnicked by the side of the road. It was cold, windy and bleak, old stone church on the hill. We ended up sitting in the car, drinking wine from plastic cups.

We returned to Wheeze's apartment and found some of Marsha's friends there watching TV. I got into a good talk with some people who were there. "The Blues Brothers" came on, and all conversation ceased. As soon as there was a pause, Marsha's friends moved away from me and clustered around the TV so there was no more human contact. Everyone withdrew and gazed passively at the screen. Fred and I decided it was a good time to leave. Val and I embraced. She came to the window and saw us off – the only one who thought to do that. Just when you think it's over ...

**Oct. 19**

Class field trip to the Hydro library in downtown Toronto. Joanne met me at York Mills station. The library is hidden in a huge glass building reflecting blue from the sky, changing with each glance. Distortions of colour and shape. Fleeting reflections of another universe. I entered, passed through glass doorways into the looking-glass. I love venturing behind the scenes – i've never been inside an office tower before. So interesting.

After the tour, Joanne and I walked back toward downtown. Windy blue-grey day, streak of pink in the sky. We talked about life, choices, telling ourselves that school must be a better alternative. Joanne said, "You can't just stay home. You can go to school and do things that seem crazy or you can get a job and get yelled at all the time. What if you don't want any of those things? What if you don't want life if it's all like this?"

**Oct. 26**

Received an A on a report. Mr Alchuk read it to the class as an example of how it should be done. He said it was done in a very free style and it flowed. Received an 88% on a computer test. I've always been bad at math, and was worried about this class, but computers and I seem to be congenial.

Field trip to Robarts Library at U of T. It looks like a medieval fortress with turrets and passageways. I imagined flags waving from the top, armoured knights standing on guard at every entrance. Bare trees, late October X-ray light. You know Camelot is going to fall and it affects everything you do. Can't say I like this time of year, but there is something drastic about it. Wandered the library, envious of all the students passing by. I commented to someone about how I was feeling exhausted. Mr Alchuk was behind me, and he started talking to me about commuting, told me they (the LIT teachers) would understand if I couldn't make it in. He also said I didn't have to phone since it's long distance from Whitby. Then he said, "I bet you miss Queen's," as if he had just read my thoughts. He also said he remembered me from the interview, which was surprising considering how many students there are in Groups A and B combined.

## **Oct. 29**

Birthday card from Joanne that said, “I hope you have a real good day even though you have to spend it in the dump (Seneca College). What can be worse than 4 jerks, Wilfred (nostrils), Fred (tentacles), Fred (sweat) and Mr Tam (alias Mr Belch), 2 wasted classes, English (smiles) and history (Mr Boom) and a partridge in a pear tree. Love Joanne. PS: Thanks for listening to all my griping.”

Everyone at school wished me a happy birthday. Nancy D seemed a little gentler than usual. We talked about dreams. Linda Partington dreamed that she was about to sing with the Righteous Brothers, but for some reason never quite made it. Says she tends to dream about things that are somehow not fulfilled, things that might have been. Lynn Sinclair dreamed a library dream – she had a whole drawer full of cards and she had to catalogue them all according to IBM numbers.

Nancy talked about running and not getting anywhere in dreams. And sunny, airy Kim Jackson has dreamed of people killing her. Kim lives alone with her young son, Benjamin. Her marriage lasted a year or so and she is outspoken about how bad it was. She often laughs about selling her wedding rings. Anyway, what could be a more appropriate topic of conversation than dreams on a Halloween weekend?

## **Nov. 2**

Did my dreaded Plato seminar. It is over. At first, I felt dizzy standing in front of everyone. Then I saw Ellen, sitting up straight, attentive, smiling supportively. Mr Boom interrupted me, but told me I was doing such a good job and that I was terrific and I was able to answer his questions. Everyone applauded me, loudly, and so many people came up and complimented me after class. They all knew how nervous I was.



Rose Wilforth is a curious person. She has soft brown eyes, fuzzy hair. Apparently, during my seminar I had looked right at her when I was talking about catharsis and crying at movies. She demanded to know why I had looked at her, how I had known she did that. I reassured her that nothing had been intended, I had not seen anything up there. Rose seems to appear out of nowhere, skimming through the halls as if her feet don't quite touch the ground. She also seems to be a little on the paranoid side.

### **Nov. 10**

Lunch at St Hubert with Ellen, Kim and Mika. We talked about Joanne, who says she is going to quit school. We tried to talk her out of it, but she seems defeated. Maybe Mika is right and she's simply not ready yet and will be fine in a year or so. Nineteen is a hard year, and she is the youngest of us. It hurts to think of losing someone I like so very much, but I've seen that sinking expression in her eyes.

Ellen thinks she should be more self-sufficient, that she should learn to stand up for herself. But what if one just isn't tough and self-sufficient? What if you're full of self-doubt and uncertainty? Not everyone can be as strong and self-reliant as Ellen. I would bet quite a bit that Ellen Ryan never had people throw food at her in a cafeteria, or been tripped and called horrible names at school. What is wrong with wanting life to be peaceful and harmonious? I only hope that this dear, dear Joanne can find it somewhere.

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Getting to know Kim Jackson. She's a very giving person, who I think has experienced a lot of pain. People don't understand her and they hurt her. I get very angry when Mrs Know-It-All Van Dam tells her to be quiet and not say such silly things, treating her like a child. I suspect that Kim has been told all her life that she's not worth much, that she's silly and childish, etc. She is hurt because Mika and Lynn excluded her from their English group because they didn't think she was capable of doing the work. She is bending over backward for this program and I wish some people understood that!

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Went into Toronto to see a movie, *Loves and Lies*. I loved it. A triumph of love, youth and hope over age and cynical manipulations. The anguish, confusion, precariousness of youth, and that wonderful ending as they clung to each other in the snow. The actress who played Katya made me weep just by the changing expressions on her face. Fluid, longing, hopeful.

Drove home down a country road. There was a curve that became sharper and narrower. The road became like a tunnel, framed by trees, all in a dreamlike amber, headlights creating a Goyaesque stage light. All of a sudden, on a night that already felt strange, Fred lost control of the car. It spun out, made a circle and smashed into the guard rails.

## **Nov. 15**

Ride home from school with Andrea Jones who lives in Port Perry. She is one of the “older women” in the class, sympathetic and feisty, really knowledgeable about current affairs. We talked about Montreal and Drapeau, classmates and nuclear disarmament. One of the most interesting conversations I’ve had in ages. It’s really good to break away from people my own age for a while and talk about ideas and issues instead of never-ending personal drama.

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I just heard that my favourite radio station CFNY is being sold. Rumours have it that it will be bought by a religious group. Every Sunday night I look forward to the Eclectic Spirit. This week was a special program on death and they played some of the most beautiful music I have ever heard. All those nights sitting out in the car, listening to this show, gazing out at the darkness, transfixed. This is such a loss.

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Ms Dodd is unpredictable. She looks like an old tortoise with hooded eyes and an unreadable expression. I think she's been teaching in that program so long she no longer really sees any of us. Mr Alchuk has kind eyes. He associates me with Queen's University and two hour commutes. Norma is tiny with twinkly little black eyes and a pointy chin. She comes from Columbia, has lived in Panama and went to Jamaica to study English. She also lived in Montreal for three years. Now that's cosmopolitan! She's a widow with a small son. She talks very quickly and her stories are fascinating.

Comfortable in Mr Alchuk's classroom today, more comfortable just hanging out with some other classmates than being with my friends in the cafeteria. Joanne joined us, a displaced Joanne who shares my fluctuating self-esteem. At one point we started talking about Wilfred and Joanne started mimicking him, doing a soft-shoe shuffle down the aisle. We were all in stitches, and Joanne reminded me so much of the Professor.

Went to Kim's apartment in Scarboro and had a little party there. Nancy, Lynn, Mika, Ellen, Joanne and I. We played cards and drank wine. Then we played a game of getting to know each other better, where we wrote something we wished we could change about ourselves. I wrote pessimism, Joanne wrote that she didn't have enough confidence. Everyone got the two of us mixed up and we shook hands. Ellen said she was too impatient. Mika thought she should be more realistic. Nancy thought she said "I" too often and Lynn said she was too sarcastic.

Ellen and I stayed overnight at Kim's. I admire Ellen so much, but can't feel close to her. I love her helpfulness, pride, dignity, "largeness of spirit." But I found her strident and judgmental without the others there. I admire her honesty, directness, lack of deceit. She would never become fogged by ambiguities like me. I liked seeing her in her flannel nightgown, simple, unadorned and definite somehow. Yet I feel I need a buffer, someone else around to soften the edges that grind between us, Joanne or Mika. Kim looked very girly in her nightgown, a complete contrast to Ellen.

Spent a long sleepless night on Kim's waterbed, drifting out on a dark sea, lights changing in the window, frilly curtains becoming gold and white. The mirror on the dresser outlined in a gleaming silver light. The moon was sickle-shaped, like a piece from a Green Ghost game.

Morning. Benjamin came in and jumped on me. He was fascinated by my red and gold scarf. I wrapped him up in it claiming I had captured him. He has nicknamed me “Lesley Mostly” after a Sesame Street character. Kim, Ellen, Benjamin and I walked over to Ben’s nursery school, past the ravine where a flasher stands and exposes himself to little kids. Lynn picked us up and we all trooped into Mr. Verity’s computer class with our overnight bags. I felt elated, as if returning from a great adventure.

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Marsha called. Val invited herself to Kingston for the weekend. Wheeze was flustered, declared she liked Val, but I had the impression she did not want to spend a whole weekend with her and wanted Fred and me to rescue her. I have been lackadaisical about keeping up with old friends these days.

### **Dec. 15**

Stayed the night with Kim. We went window-shopping in Yorkville, in the rain. A quiet gentle rain, Christmas lights melting into puddles around us. Streets turned into rivers and buildings were old and inviting with warm lights. We went to Hazelton Lanes, browsed through lovely imported soaps. The places was deserted except for shopkeepers closing up. Rain tip-toed all around the huge Christmas tree in the square.

Kim’s airy chatter refreshing. Nothing heavy, weighted, ponderous. By the end of the evening I felt no closer to her than when we started. But I felt a sense of freedom, knowing my actions or something I said will not make or break an evening, hurt or betray anyone. We sat in the subway station, darkness ready to shatter the walls of the bathysphere. Kim’s father picked us up, along with a tired, fretful Benjamin. Mr Jackson kept telling Ben not to cry because boys aren’t supposed to cry. I don’t think much crying is done by anyone in that family. At one point we stopped at a store so Kim could buy some corn oil and Mr Jackson told me that Benjamin was always fine when he was with his grandparents, but when “she” (Kim) came around he became upset. Didn’t seem like a very supportive thing to say about his daughter. I have the feeling that Kim has always been made to feel inadequate, that she’s not smart, pretty or responsible enough.

Kim does seem to upset Benjamin, though. She moves quickly, brusquely, with little physical contact, so it seems as if Ben has to keep up with her. She is constantly swerving and before you know it, her attentions have shifted and she's off in another direction. Sometimes it seems to me as if she is a little harsh with him when he doesn't want to go to bed, when he fusses or has to go to the potty. But what do I know? These are completely useless impressions coming from someone who is not a single mother going to school full-time to better herself.

### **Dec. 17**

Class party. Linda P. brought her guitar. The class requested Christmas songs but she was scornful. Instead she played anti-war songs from the '60s. Eventually she relented and played "The Twelve Days of Christmas" for us. Joanne and I sat together and hammed it up, singing opera on the 5 gold rings part. Other people joined in with us because they thought we were having so much fun. Linda has a very powerful voice and she moved to Toronto hoping she could make a living with her music. She couldn't, and so she is in our class at Seneca College.

After the party, ten of us went to St Hubert for drinks. For some reason Lynn and I started talking about especially, UFOs and spiritualism. She says she's had experiences with all three. One night she couldn't stop thinking about a friend and finally started crying and writing a poem to her. Lynn then called, and found out the friend was contemplating suicide. Lynn was able to talk her out of it. Joanne is a born-again Christian, but is open-minded and tolerant, not a Bible-basher. I know she is hurting because no one else in the class believes in God the way she does and she feels alone.

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Kingston. Fred and I, Val and Matt at Marsha's apartment The chemistry was better this time. Everyone was anxious to please and there were no scenes like the last visit. Val talked more about her present life and was less fixated on the past. On Saturday we all herded into Ross's gift shop. The woman in the store recognized Val, Fred and me and talked with us for about forty minutes about Queen's, the old days at Elrond. She remembered the time Fred and me and Val and Al were in the store buying stuffed animals for each other, and she asked about Al. We went on to the Pilot House. Distracted by Ian Dury's "Spasticus Autisticus," which took me right out of Kingston and back to my new life in Toronto. Went to Marsha's friend Chris Fernandes's apartment to watch *Harold and Maude*. I love that movie. The only one who didn't like it was Val, who declared it morbid.

Marsha's mother called, very upset because Marsha is planning to spend Christmas in Kingston with her boyfriend John. He is not welcome by her family as they are now living together. Her mother was reproachful, but Marsha stood her ground. She was almost in tears, though, after she got off the phone.

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We gave Fred's co-worker, Joan Elgie, a ride to Guildwood train station. Every time I see her she looks different from what I expect. Sharper and more sophisticated yet blurry, out of focus, at the same time. She has been depressed and unsettled lately. She talked erratically about how much she wants to leave Oshawa, change jobs, go back to school, get some training to do something else, all of the above. She's caught in a deadlock and doesn't know what she wants. She was hoping she'd finally be straightened out and more at peace by thirty, but instead she is in more turmoil than ever. She seems glad to be going home to the Gaspé for Christmas. She said she wouldn't get there until night and would be travelling in the dark on the train past all the little farmhouses in Quebec and all the lights. I wish I could be taking that trip on the train.

No adventures for me this year and I feel let-down, apathetic. Last year I went to Montréal to visit Jim. I left Barrie at 7 a.m. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, travelling down Highway 400 in the frigid cold in the early darkness. That was only a year ago! Two years ago, I was caught in a snowstorm in Montréal and had to wait four hours before I could get a bus to Toronto. Hundreds of people were stranded at Terminus Centre-ville. I passed the time with Jim, driving down Ste-Catherine through the snow. I finally arrived in Toronto on the midnight bus, and Fred was waiting for me. I miss bus trips, adventures, misadventures.

Went to Barrie on the 24<sup>th</sup>. We cut the visit short, without even waiting long enough to visit Sir J in Orillia. I wish I could go to Barrie and not always end up feeling threatened, under attack even. My individuality feels too fragile to withstand my parents, and I can feel myself digging into my past self. I always leave with regrets, feeling I have somehow failed again and let myself down.

## **Dec. 29**

Marsha flapped in on a surprise visit at eleven this morning. She was high-strung, full of pent-up anger after a visit with her family in Lindsay. We drank white wine and she raged about the pettiness of her family's treatment of John, and how her mother is trying to put a wedge between her siblings by demanding they choose sides on the "John issue."

The issue is that they think Marsha and John are "living in sin" because they are not married. According to Marsha, they refuse to see John as a person, and they treated him with icy politeness. Even her older sister, Marguerite, didn't take Marsha's side. Marsha deeply loves this older sister, and I could see how much that hurt. The most enjoyable time M spent this holiday was with her little cousins. They were bright, lively, honest and out of all the family, only these children could accept John as the nice man he is. Where the adults saw sin, the children asked about "the nice man with the beard." Marsha's favourite uncle asked her if she was a survivor. He said her older brother Martin and sister Marguerite haven't survived their early years, but that her younger brother Mark has survived, has broken ties with the past and is living his own life. He said he wasn't sure about Marsha.

Marsha is honest, generous, idealistic, but she has emotions that do not always surface. Many dark emotions, angers, fears well up deep inside, emotions that keep her in turmoil. She takes many things to heart, especially guilt feelings. Her anger becomes repressed and eventually explodes like a bazooka. She's a bit like Fred, in that you never know when they will turn on you. There is a comic quality to her firecracker expulsions. Sometimes it is hard to take seriously, as if she is performing and it is a mock-rage.

Speaking of comedy and cartoonish scenes, we finished a bottle of white wine then attempted to open a rosé. The corkscrew broke. We tried getting the whole thing out with pliers then tried spearing the cork with a fork. (Forking the cork?) We almost got a knife stuck in the bottle until I finally rammed the cork through a skewer. By this time we were both in stitches. I thought I heard someone at the door and when I returned, Wheeze was pouring the wine through a sieve into a large bowl. I collapsed on a chair roaring with laughter. Then we shared a bowl of wine sitting on the stove with bits of cork floating in it. We ripped up a box, made a funnel out of it and strained the wine into a ginger ale bottle. (Empty. I do feel the need to note that.) After all that, the wine tasted surprisingly good.

We hopped a bus to Oshawa and went to see *Peter Pan* on impulse. Fred joined us and Wheeze decided to stay the night and get a ride to Kingston with us on Friday. We went to see Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie*, which we all enjoyed it. I couldn't for the life of me understand how anyone could possibly think the Dustin Hoffman could be anything but a man in drag. I've seen British cross-dressers who looked more authentic. But I liked the movie's message about men, women and relationships, that men can be sensitive and understanding, women do not have to be dishrags and people should have the freedom to be themselves.

*Diner*, on the other hand, was a horrible movie about boors and dishrags, the opposite of *Tootsie*. I found nothing amusing or touching about this story of five guys growing up in the early 60s. It did make me realize some things though. How lucky I am to have known the people I've known. I get angry when I see tag-along girls, looking like hood ornaments, with no identity of their own.



### **Dec. 30**

Sharon called this morning and reproached both Marsha and me. This is a common occurrence. She was disappointed that Marsha stayed with us and did not go to a dinner in Toronto that included Flo and various Watsons, Angelo and several other old Elronders taken from their museum cases and propped up around a table. I suspect that one of the reasons Sharon was upset with us was because she really didn't have as good a time as she claimed, and that she was really counting on Wheeze being there.

Sharon was upset at me because I had not called or made arrangements for a visit this week. I was abandoning her to go to Montréal instead. She moaned at me, said she would have to mail her Christmas present to me and I probably wouldn't be able to see her again because she would be so busy. Wheeze and I made speeches about guilt and reproach. As soon as the clock said noon, we opened the wine. We ended up drinking wine for most of the afternoon, in our pyjamas, dancing around the room, asserting freedom, independence and the right to live our own lives! Next day we dropped Marsha off in Kingston and Fred and I went on to Montréal.

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Just finished a depressing Simenon (*The Others*). It took an excruciatingly long time to read because I could not take too much of it at once. These books are bad dreams. Day after day the characters act out their own fated patterns, alienated routine. They wake up and recreate the same roles, the same relationships. Something happens, the door of the cage is opened but no one ever leaves. These characters are never liberated. Death of the individual ego.

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Love being in Montreal. Bought a lovely black cape-like coat and matching beret. Then on to Metamorphosis, where I splurged on a book about holistic astrology. Am doing another chart, this one for John Vegter, another person from Fred's office. I have just drawn the chart and want to absorb it for a while.

I've learned some things from Joan's session. I have to be able to communicate at the client's level. I'm too used to writing Humanities essays and school reports. Too much precision and info is confusing and superfluous. Joan was barraged by a lot of info that she couldn't really use. I also find it extremely uncomfortable bringing up red flag aspects in a chart. I didn't even know how to broach the topic of sex with Joan.

The other problem is first impressions. I don't believe in them. I tend to form an impression of someone very quickly and most of the time I am completely wrong. This becomes a real problem when you are working with someone's chart. Way too easy to use the chart to justify one's own impression. I may be using an aspect to illustrate something I thought I noticed in the person, that may simply not be that important. It is one moment in someone's life, my vision may be distorted in the first place, or I may be only be illustrating my own vision. Beware of first impressions.

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Fred and I made our way through the ruelles. Windows glowing orange in the night. Pocked walls. Store with old yellowing appliances in a former show-room window. Wringer washing machines, big 60s beast console TVs. Cobwebby light and a sign over the door saying, "Ouvert," although it is midnight. Springy old couch propped up in a doorway. I walked by it, then jumped as I heard a noise. Fred was hidden there like a corpse, waving and saying, "Good ev-e-ning."

Rue Alexandre-de-Sevre. Glimmering railing. Curving yellow and blue steps, plastic wheels, broken toys. "Depanneur Julie" washed in an eerie green light, a moonstone glowing from a dark cave. Cream-coloured wall, blue-grey painting of a man and woman's faces, joined, melting into each other. Another mural of a black man smoking a cigarette. Another of a sunset, blue-white mountains. Colourful jumble of shapes, patchwork bits. Green, yellow, orange, alley cat fences. Tall crooked telephone poles. Grey wall, cracks extending like rivers on a map. Tall windows like old unpolished mirrors.

It was only last year that I visited Jim and stayed at the Raphael Motel, picking my way up rickety stairs coated with thick ice. I could not feel the steps themselves, only the slippery surface, tinted with swirls of green and yellow.

Some buildings recede into the darkness, windows hollowed out, a glimpse of lost treasure, the hull of an ancient ship at the bottom of the ocean. A yellow building stands above the others, watching as the whole neighbourhood changes, other buildings sprouting, crowded, blotched, colourful as toadstools. Yellow graffiti on a sea-grey wall, “J’ai deux héritages, Édith Piaf & Elton John.”

We drove through a silent snowy world to get bagels. A woman walking carefully from church bundled up in a large black coat, carrying a baguette, gave us a big smile. Snow-lined blue fence with a sign that said “Entrance to the Mikva.” More graffiti, “Make bagels not bombs.” Romano’s for pizza. A happy day.